

Confirming governors for territories of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines

Introduction

President Theodore Roosevelt wrote this letter to William H. Hunt, the Governor of Porto Rico just twelve days after he assumed the presidency following President William McKinley's assassination. In it, Roosevelt seeks to promote stability and continuity in the government, both internally and internationally.

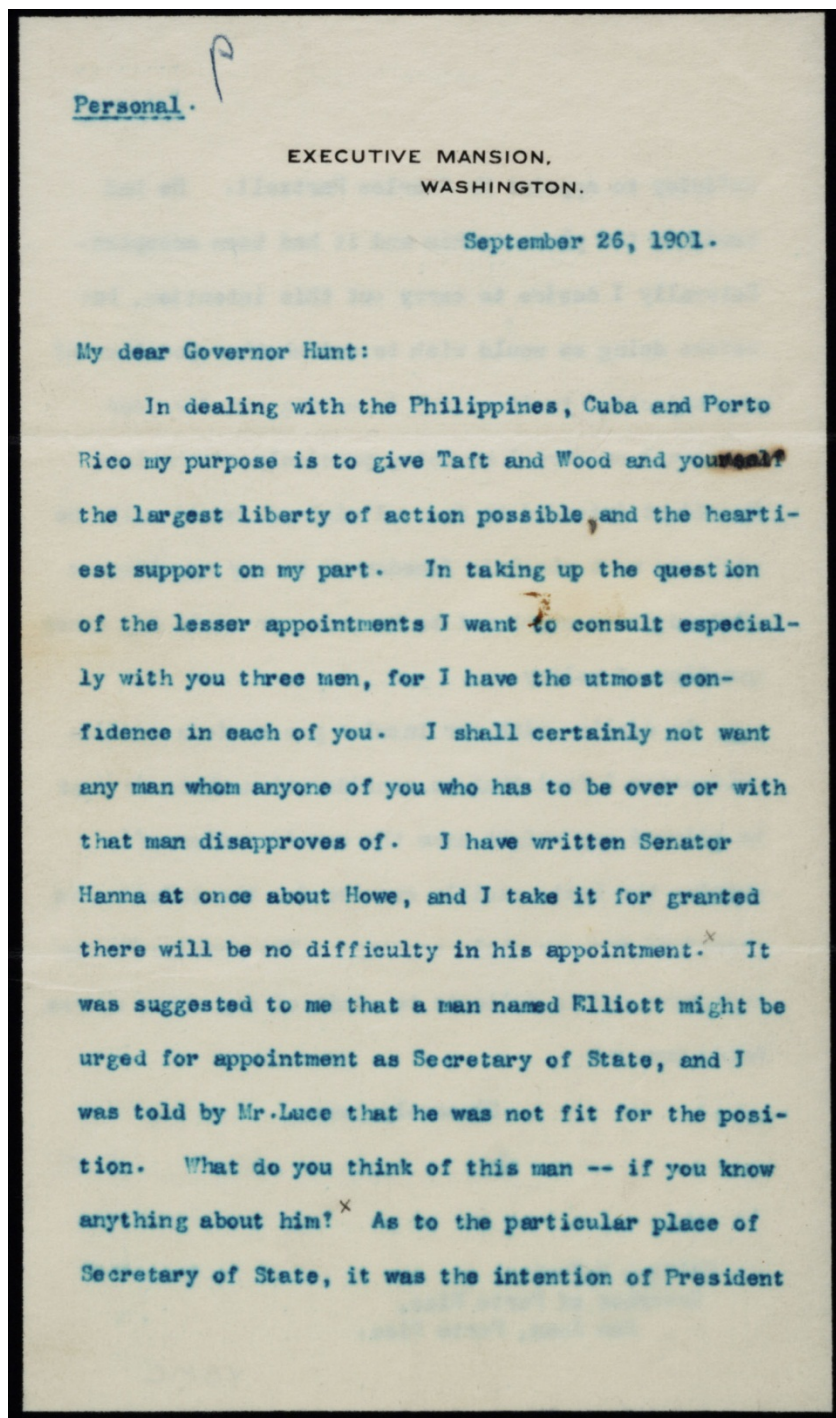
During this transitional period, Roosevelt assures Hunt that the territorial governors would be given the "largest liberty of action possible, and the heartiest support on my part" and seeks advice on appointing a Secretary of State. "[I]t was the intention of President McKinley to appoint Mr. Charles Hartzell. He had tendered the place to him and it had been accepted. Naturally I desire to carry out this intention, but before doing so would wish to ask whether you know of any objection to it – and in asking you for your opinion I am sure I am doing precisely as the late President intended to do."

Hunt was recalled from Porto Rico in 1904 and made a judge on the U.S. District Court in Montana and later on the 9th Circuit of the Court of Appeals. William H. Taft ably administered the Philippines, despite an on-going insurgency that continued until 1916, and returned to join Roosevelt's cabinet as Secretary of War in 1904. Leonard Wood led a controversial reorganization of Cuban government and society during his governorship, which lasted until 1902. He later went to the Philippines and in 1906 was the leader of one of the largest massacres of insurgents in the Moro Province, where 600 men, women, and children became casualties. Despite the controversy surrounding Wood, Taft would appoint him Army Chief of Staff in 1910.

(Federal authorities changed the spelling from Puerto Rico to Porto Rico in 1899. It reverted to Puerto Rico in 1932.)

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Image



Theodore Roosevelt to William H. Hunt, September 26, 1901 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC05803)

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Naturally I desire to carry out this intention, but
before doing so would wish to ask whether you know of
any objection to it -- and in asking you for your
opinion I am sure I am doing precisely as the late
President intended to do. I wish you would write me
with the most absolute freedom as to any appointment
that ought or ought not to be made, or as to any other
question of policy.

In dealing with our insular possessions and de-
pendencies I feel that no consideration whatever must
be allowed any weight save the consideration of
getting the best possible service for the islands and
therefore for our whole country. The problem is far
too grave and too delicate to admit of any other course
being pursued.

Sincerely yours,

Theodore Roosevelt

Hon. William H. Hunt,
Governor of Porto Rico,
San Juan, Porto Rico.